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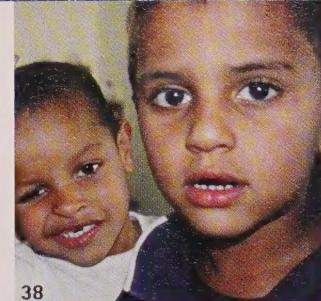
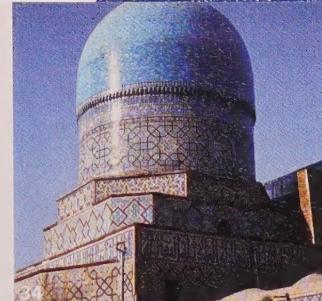
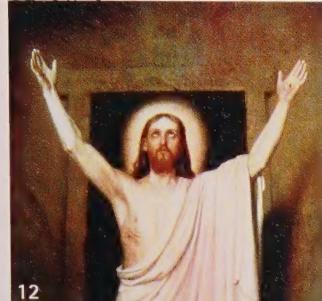


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DEPARTMENTS

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 3 APRIL 2003

4 Editors' Note and Letters

5 Give Us This Day

10 Mothering Seasons

19 IdeaNet

20 Reader Call

26 Bible Study

**Grace upon Grace:
A Study of the Gospel of John**

Love in the Daily Things *Marj Leegard*

My Life's Quilt *Sylvia Leslie*

Does your congregation or women's group lift up the accomplishments of younger members or interact with local students?

Readers share times when they had to remind themselves that they are children of God.

Session 8: The Time of Trial After Jesus is arrested, he is brought before the Jewish leaders, Annas and Caiaphas, and then the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Ostensibly, it is Jesus who is on trial, yet as the story unfolds, the tables turn. In this session, we see how Peter, Pilate, and the Jewish authorities also face their own time of trial during the trial of Jesus, and we reflect on how courage and fear may be part of our own life of faith.
Mary Hinkle

41 Grace Notes

The Perfect Easter *Mary Ellen Kiesner*

42 Amen!

Easter Hope *Catherine Malotky*

HAVE YOU SEEN THE LORD?

6 In Jesus' Name We Pray

A student's question starts a lively discussion about some familiar words and the question, "Why do we pray in Jesus' name?" *Deborah McConomy-Wallace*

12 The Roots of Easter

The roots of the resurrection reach deep into the soil of God's word. Buried prophecies, bits and pieces of ideas, and ancient stories take on new meaning in the light of God's action at Easter. *Donna L. Herzfeldt-Kamprath*

16 Friends for Life

Romantic love lifts us from monotony and transforms us, to be sure. But what about friendship? *Clare La Plante*

**22 Reaching Out, Reaching In:
A Journey of Individuals
Together in Faith**

Have you ever felt alone, even among those with whom you share a common faith? Some discussions are more challenging than others but still need to take place. This overview of the ELCA's Sexuality Study explains the process and intended outcomes. *Margaret G. Payne*

PLUS . . .

15 Question of the Month

This month's question: How many times a month do you write someone a letter? Also, your answers concerning the primary way you encourage and celebrate the youth in your church and community.

33 Bible Study Introduction Events

Dates, locations, and contact information for 2003-2004 Bible study introduction events. You won't want to miss these opportunities!

**34 Muslim Mothers:
Storing Up Riches for Heaven**

What is it like to live and work in an Islamic setting? Insights into life as a Muslim woman. *Nelly van Doorn-Harder*

**38 Dollars Make a Difference:
How Your Gifts Give New Hope**

How have you helped street children in Brazil? Women of the ELCA gifts are directly at work here and in other ministries. *Doris Strieter*

43 Directory of Reader Services

Valuable information for every reader.



Dear Readers,

April is a month of hope, with the warming sun, the longer hours of daylight, the first emerging buds. The greatest promise of hope that comes to us this season is the promise of eternal life made manifest in Jesus. With his triumph over sin, death, and the power of the devil, we are all given the opportunity to experience the peace that surpasses all understanding. As we reflect on God's great love for us, let us continue to seek peace for all.—the eds.

Letters

I can barely believe that you would print a letter so political, so full of misinformation as that of Edith Pavone of Joppa, Maryland (December 2002).

In the first place, there is no sacrificing, to any degree, of our children. The government, according to common sense and according to our Constitution, was never intended to feed or clothe our children. Parents should do that, and there are many resources to help them out. Families and churches used to take care of their own. Do we want socialism (maybe leading to communism), or do we want to preserve our precious freedoms?

As for the tax cuts, we should all welcome them, for it is our money and will help on the home front. We need to take care of our own at home, and not involve government. It's sad that churches today also expect the government to care for their people.

If the letter writer's stand is that of ELCA and Women of the ELCA, perhaps I'm in the wrong church. I pray that she is simply misinformed.

Anna L. Yanos—Cambridge City, Ind.

We welcome letters from all our readers, and the "Letters" section therefore reflects a range of opinions. This is a good

time to remind readers of LWT's editorial policy, printed on the inside back cover of each issue: Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writer, and, except for the Women of the ELCA departments and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of Women of the ELCA.—the eds.

The article about June Johnson in the November 2002 issue stirred many happy memories for me. I, too, am 81, and received a scholarship, the Cronk Memorial Scholarship. I was 19, and the gift came from the Women's Missionary Society. That scholarship and a subsequent one enabled me to finish college with the dream of becoming a medical missionary.

God had other plans for me. I married a pastor and raised a family. Yet the gratitude I felt to the Women's Missionary Society impelled me to become active in that organization, later the United Lutheran Church Women, Lutheran Church Women, and now Women of the ELCA. I have served at the local, conference, synodical, and national levels. The women continued to give to me and to prepare me for ever more exciting challenges. I thank God for all the faithful women who taught me and guided me through the years.

Edna Wagschal—Waynesville, N.C.



G I V E U S T H I S D A Y

Love in the Daily Things

by Marj Leegard

IN ACTS, WE READ THE STORY OF PAUL AND SILAS
GETTING INTO TROUBLE BECAUSE OF THEIR DEALINGS
WITH A SLAVE GIRL. THE GIRL FOLLOWED THEM AND
SHOUTED AND JUST GENERALLY MADE A NUISANCE
OF HERSELF. Paul, exasperated, called on the name of Jesus to take away her evil spirit—and it happened. Not only did the shouting stop, but the girl could no longer foretell the future, so her profitability to her owners as a fortuneteller was gone too.

Now the owners were angry. They dragged Paul and Silas into court. You know the story: Paul and Silas were thrown in jail, an earthquake tore the jail apart, and the poor jailer feared for his life, knowing that his prisoners had probably escaped. But Paul and Silas were still there. What could have kept them from going? The relieved jailer listened to Paul and Silas and had his own private catechism instruction. He believed. But that is only the beginning of the story.

At home, the jailer most likely did the things that keepers of households do. Inconsequential things. Daily things. Expected things. Things having to do with those everlasting tiny details. He took care of the cuts and bruises. He and everyone in his household were baptized, and then he gave Paul and Silas something to eat.

The world for which Christ died comes right along with belief. The cuts, the bruises, all waiting for the believer's kind hand. And gathered together with the wounds is the baptism. It is not a thing apart—a pristine baby nestled in white crocheting—but a gathering of the world that God loves. The new faith bound to the faith

of all believers and bound to all the waiting world. After the earthquake, the fear, the confessions of faith, the baptism, comes again the meeting of those daily needs. He gave them something to eat. This is not a small isolated act but a part of faith.

When Phyllis reminds us of the needs of the local food pantry, she is doing what the jailer did: believing and then doing. When John bakes a pie to share with two friends, the two decide to call two more. Then the five scrunch into the car to go to another two, and a happy pie-eating group is formed. Two in the group have a terminal illness. All are blessed with the part of life that follows the declaration of faith: the declaration of love in the daily things.

We make life fragmented. We make Sunday different from Monday, Christmas different from Lent. Pastors different from parishioners. Housework different from writing. Everything chopped into compartments.

Read the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16 in an easy reading version, Contemporary English perhaps. Does it take an earthquake to show us that faith and life and baptism and the world and binding wounds and giving to eat are all of a piece?

Not an earthquake but just a gentle shake will remind us in our daily walk that we too bring faith into our homes. We care for the wounded of the world. We share together our common meals and the most uncommon bread and wine.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.



IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY

by Deborah McEconomy-Wallace

It was probably a mistake to begin a catechetical lesson on the Holy Spirit by asking eighth- and ninth-graders, "Do you believe in ghosts?" A question like that is guaranteed to provoke a theological free-for-all, which is precisely what happened.

Surprised to learn that the only ghost Christians believe in is the Holy Ghost, my students pelted me with questions about everything they had ever wanted to know about the Christian faith. Even students who rarely joined the conversation voluntarily were bouncing on the edge of their seats, hands raised, eager to help interrogate the pastor.

Infected by their enthusiasm and desire for discussion, I was enjoying the session as much as they were and even began to feel pretty pleased with the way I was handling their questions.

That was a big mistake. As soon as I started to relax, one student asked, "Why do we always end prayers by saying, 'In Jesus' name we pray'?"

"What a good question!" I replied in that pseudo-enthusiastic tone teachers use when they've been thrown a curve ball and need to stall for time to think up an answer.

START WITH SCRIPTURE

One of my seminary professors used to say, when in doubt, start with Scripture. Heeding these wise words, I told the class to open their Bibles to John 14:13–14. Here, Jesus tells his disciples: "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it." In John 15:16, Jesus says, "the Father will give

you whatever you ask him in my name.” John 16:23–24 continues to expand on this theme. Again, Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

After reading these passages, Hannah asked, “Why did Jesus tell the disciples so many times to pray in his name?”

Before I could answer, Sue said, “These passages are in the part of John’s Gospel right before the crucifixion, when Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure. I think he’s telling them that God will still hear their prayers after Jesus leaves.”

“Is there anywhere else in the New Testament where we’re told to pray in Jesus’ name?” Hannah asked.

“In Ephesians 5:20, Paul urges the Ephesians to give ‘thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ ” I said. “Offering prayers to God in the name of Jesus was probably already a custom in the early church.¹”

Jan spoke up: “But what good does it do to pray in Jesus’ name?”

“Ummm . . .” I mumbled. As I fumbled for an answer, some parents came into the parlor, wondering why their children had not yet started their customary thundering end-of-class stampede into the parking lot. “We’ve got to stop now,” I concluded.

They groaned. “Can’t we keep going?” (And you thought miracles didn’t happen!) “We’ll pick up the discussion here next week,” I said. “In the meantime, think. What good *does* it do to pray in Jesus’ name?”

WHAT GOOD DOES IT DO?

I drove home that evening deep in thought. When I was my students’ age, I learned that prayer involves more than just my bending God’s ear. Prayer is actually two-way communication between God and human-

ity. In prayer, God reaches out to communicate with us, while we speak with and (we hope) listen to God.

In his introduction to the Lord’s Prayer in the *Large Catechism*, Luther writes, “To pray . . . is to call upon God in every need. This God requires of us; it is not a matter of our choice.”¹

Having been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, we believe that Jesus died for our sakes in order to pay the price for our sins. Through his saving action, Christ is our propitiator, the one who sacrificed himself to regain God’s good will toward us. The risen and ascended Lord is the one who intercedes with God on our behalf (Romans 8:34). We can therefore pray with confidence that God will answer the prayers we make in Jesus’ name.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

To pray in Jesus’ name makes a statement about the position that Jesus claims in our lives.² In the very act of naming the name of Jesus, we acknowledge that he is Lord of our life and of all creation. Our entire life, then, becomes a response to his gracious and forgiving love for us. When we pray in Jesus’ name, we are transformed. We put our life in God’s hands, and we become part of God’s saving work in the world.

Theologian Keith Hubbard writes that when we pray in Jesus’ name, we are “drawn into a transformative relationship with him. . . . There is a movement outward and to others that starts . . . with a movement upwards—a cry of the heart to the Lord Jesus. . . . We are sent onward and out by the one we are invoking.”³

Prayer may not change the outcome of a given situation, but it will transform the soul of the one who prays. You cringe when Betty-Anne sits behind you at the 11 o’clock service because she has the singing voice of a file rasping across rough metal. Instead of feeling annoyed, pray for her. Her voice won’t change. But your heart will.

FOR WHAT, THEN, SHALL WE PRAY?

The next week, class had barely begun when Shandra asked, "What if you pray in Jesus' name and you don't get what you pray for?"

"If you pray for an A on the algebra test but you didn't study and you're clueless about algebra, you haven't got a prayer," Matt replied.

"Well, duh," Shandra shot back. "I know God doesn't suspend the laws of the universe! But last week I kept praying that Mom would get that new job she interviewed for. She didn't."

"Sometimes when you get turned down, it's because something better is going to come along," Andre said.

"Good point," I said. "I just read a book about prayer in which the writer said, 'Sometimes we may not get what we consciously ask for because . . . the no or wait that we receive from God turns out to be part of an immeasurably larger yes.'⁴ Then, too," I went on, "ask yourself if what you're asking for is consistent with God's will. When my dad was diagnosed with cancer six years ago, the doctors told us that there was no hope of a cure, and Dad had only weeks left to live. We didn't pray for him to miraculously recover. Instead, praying in Jesus' name, we commended Dad to God's gracious and loving care. Dad died a few weeks later. I felt then, and still feel, that our prayers were answered."

CAN WE PRAY WITH THOSE WHO ARE NOT CHRISTIANS?

Cory asked, "If you were asked to pray at an event where there would be people who probably aren't even Christian, would you end your prayer with, 'In Jesus' name we pray'?"

"When our school district was on strike last fall," I replied, "I was asked to lead prayer services for faculty and staff. I knew that both Christians

and Jews would be attending, so I deliberately did not name the name of Jesus. When we prayed, we were all praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but the Christians prayed believing that this is the same God who has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

"Whether we were *praying together* or just *praying next to each other* because we held different beliefs, I don't know. But it was a powerful, grace-filled experience for all of us. In some settings where people of different faiths are gathered," I added, "I *would* pray in Jesus' name, knowing that each person's prayer was to give authentic witness to the faith tradition he or she represented, and that others would be praying and listening with that same understanding."

A few weeks later, catechetical classes ended for the year. On Pentecost, the ninth-graders affirmed their faith. They still come to worship regularly, and they assure me that they pray because they believe that prayer in Jesus' name works.

Speaking of prayers, the next catechetical class topic is the sixth commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." I think we're in for another lively discussion! Please pray for me—in Jesus' name, of course.

Deborah McConomy-Wallace is pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church, North Wales, Pa., and an adjunct professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

NOTES

1. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 441:8.
2. Keith Hubbard, *In the Name of Jesus* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2000), 7.
3. Hubbard, *In the Name of Jesus*, 8.
4. John Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer: Boldness and Blessing in the Name of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 62.

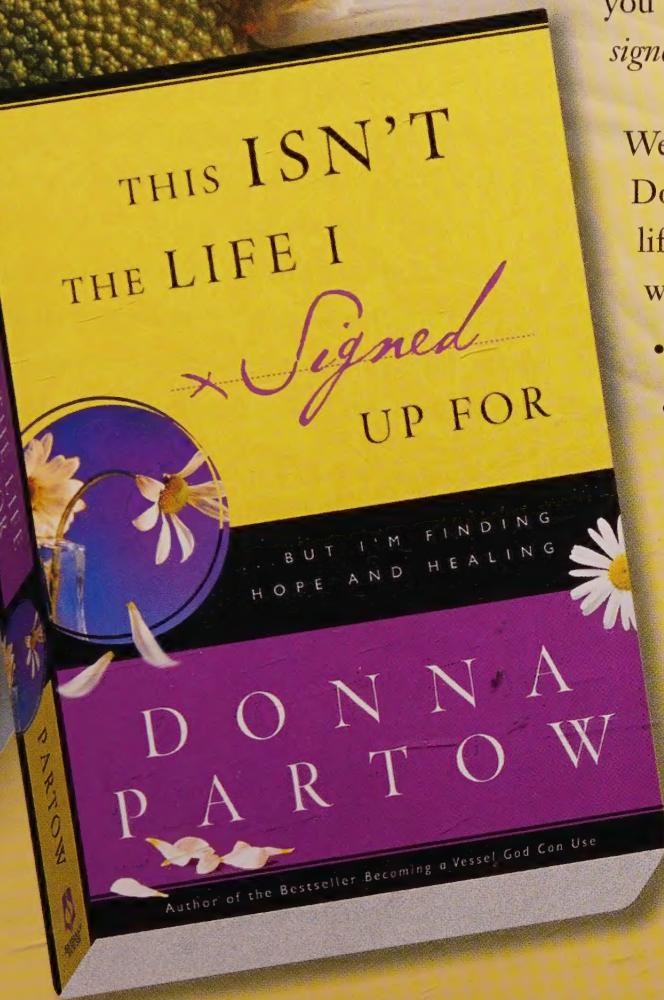


Not long ago it all seemed possible. You'd have a great marriage with great kids. There'd be lifelong friendships, vibrant health, and answers to all your best dreams. But now you look around and say, *This isn't what I signed up for. What's going on here?*

We all want to live happily ever after. Donna Partow uses stories from her own life to examine issues common to all women, including:

- Disappointing relationships
- Foolish choices
- Less than perfect families
- The search for love
- The desire to make your life count

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My Life's Quilt

by Sylvia Leslie

MY 70TH BIRTHDAY IS FAST APPROACHING, AND IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SO MANY YEARS HAVE SAILED BY. I HAVE ALWAYS LOOKED FORWARD TO EACH NEW DAY INSTEAD OF LOOKING BACK, BUT NOW AS I SIT TO WRITE THESE WORDS, I CANNOT HELP REMINISCING A BIT ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE SHAPED MY LIFE. A MAJOR PART OF THESE EXPERIENCES HAS BEEN MY ROLE AS A MOTHER.

I realize, as I reflect, that my perceptions now are somewhat different from those I had when we were “in the moment.” Certainly there were highs and lows over the years, but time has allowed me to see the beauty in all of the experiences—even those that were more difficult at the time. Even though I knew it then, I see more clearly now that even in our lowest moments, we were never alone. The parent was also cared for as a child—a child of God. This is the thread that has lovingly joined all the parts of my life together and held them firm.

Growing up, I was fortunate to be part of a loving, churchgoing family. As the fourth of five children, I felt protected in my surroundings, and at the same time I was encouraged to develop my potential in every way. My parents nurtured their children with love and discipline and treated each of us as special individuals. Along the way, we sensed our responsibility to ourselves and others.

Not long after graduating from nursing school in St. Louis, Missouri, I moved to the San Francisco Bay area. I enjoyed my new role working in medical and surgical nursing. My social life centered around

a singles’ group in a Presbyterian church. Little did I know how my life would change!

Through the singles’ group, I met Bill, an architect, a widower with three children: Jan, age 7, Dean, 4, and Karen, a 20-month-old toddler. The little ones were sweet and eager to have a mommy in their lives. Our marriage in 1957, when I was 23, made their wish a reality.

To say that this new stage in my life was a challenge would be an understatement! I felt confident at the time and thought (perhaps naively) that I was fully prepared to face all the adjustments that come with being newly married with a ready-made family. I realized early on that my learning curve would be steep and that I would have to be flexible!

Bill and I agreed that we would all benefit if I did not continue my nursing career. I welcomed the “stay-at-home” approach—Bill was a team player! He enjoyed being with his children, and we added two more sons, Eric and Dana. Bill was a hands-on dad, and a good one!

Children make for busy times; our household was no exception. No matter how worthwhile the activities were, though, we felt pressed for time, especially when all five children were going in different directions. I see my grown children and their families struggling today to keep some balance in their lives between home, work, church, and school events. It was those very activities of my children’s childhood days that I missed most when the nest was empty!

The teen years presented many challenges, mostly from the peer pressure my children felt during the late 1960s. That was a strong force! Keeping a healthy perspective was difficult, but I am grateful for that maturing process, both for myself and my children. What a privilege to witness the growth and change in each of these wonderful human beings. To this day, I am amazed at how different, unique, and special Jan, Dean, Karen, Eric, and Dana are.

1982 was a sad year for our family. Both my mother and Bill's mother passed away that year, but the biggest blow was closer to home: Bill was diagnosed with cancer of the kidney. The doctors thought

As I had done in the past, I turned to prayer: "Lord, give me the wisdom and strength to face this situation." Once again, I found the support I needed in family and friends. What a comforting gift.

The busy years that followed helped me keep a healthy outlook. All five children are now married, and each grandchild was a joyful addition.

After 19 years of widowhood, a miracle happened. A widower, John—an old friend—embarked with me on a new beginning in our lives. My children and grandchildren were thrilled about our wedding announcement. A nine-year-old granddaughter asked me, "Do old people really get married?" I replied, "They do indeed!"

A widower, John—an old friend—embarked with me on a new beginning in our lives.

he would have two or three more years to live, but he survived for just five months. What could have been five months of fear and anger turned out to be a meaningful time for reflection with family and friends. Bill left us with dignity, at peace, and as he wished—surrounded by his children and me, at home.

Bill's death left me feeling that a part of me had died. I was only 49, but I found it hard to look forward or plan ahead. The realization that Bill and I wouldn't grow old together left me feeling empty. Our children experienced their loss in their own ways. I reminded myself often that I was not the only person grieving! I knew that I had to move forward, not only for myself but also to help my children get on with their lives.

John is enjoying this new experience of having children and grandchildren. Never having been a father, he is thrilled to be a part of our children's and grandchildren's lives, and they have welcomed him with open arms. John and I are grateful for this opportunity to share our lives, and I have a thoughtful and loving soulmate with whom to share my life and family.

I give thanks daily for my faith in God and for all the opportunities I have had as part of a family. Thanks be to God!

Sylvia Leslie is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She is also a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Palo Alto, Calif.



THE ROOTS OF EASTER

by Donna L. Herzfeldt-Kamprath

PROLOGUE



ast summer, my husband and I took our four children to visit my family in Wisconsin. The children dubbed the trip "Mom's Memory Miles" because I took them to visit so many relatives! Two reasons for the reminiscing were the deaths of my uncle, who had suffered from Alzheimer's disease, and my cousin, younger than I, who had died suddenly of heart disease.

On the afternoon we visited my aunt, we visited the cemetery where many of my relatives are buried. My aunt showed us where her husband is buried. Mom and Dad pointed out the spot next to Grandma and Grandpa where they will be buried. The children saw for the first time the place where my brother's body rests, as well as the niches where other family members' ashes are set.

The time spent walking the grounds and trimming the grass around our relatives' grave markers stirred up remembrances. "Do you remember how odd it felt to drive away before they lowered David's casket into the ground?" "I forgot that Aunt Etz and Uncle Gib had a baby who died." "No, it doesn't matter to me if I'm buried or cremated. I won't be there anymore." Our conversation

was like a hoe loosening the soil around the base of a plant, revealing the roots hidden below.

Without the roots, such conversation in a graveyard could be morbid. But the roots of faith and history and promise give strength and balance to lives that are lived in a world with cemeteries and family stories and daily deaths.

I thank God that our family tour of the cemetery and mausoleum could be rooted in a shared Easter faith. All the deaths we surveyed that afternoon—from AIDS, dementia, sudden infant death syndrome, old age, accidents, other causes—witnessed to the power of death in this world. The peace in our hearts as we walked in that place witnessed to the power of Easter to challenge death's hold on our lives.

We need Easter roots to be able to deal productively with the reality and effects of death. Easter is a day to remember and celebrate the event of the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The Easter season of the church year gives us time to reflect on the meaning of that event and encounter again and again the risen Christ. Easter makes Christianity unique among religions. The roots of Easter are hidden, yet active and productive in the life of the church.

Hidden Roots

About 2,000 years ago, a group of women went early in the morning to a burial garden in Jerusalem. They expected to anoint the dead body of Jesus with the spices and ointments that they had brought with them. Why wouldn't they expect to do that—they had seen him die on the cross, and his body had been laid in the tomb only two days before!

But in the darkness and emptiness of that in-

between day, everything had changed. Roots work that way. Most roots do their work in darkness, unseen. We take them for granted. "Silently, unseen, undescribed, God's greatest act is felt in its effects, not chronicled in its details."¹

Now in this new morning, the women begin to notice those roots. "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen," declare two figures in dazzling clothes standing near

the empty tomb. “Remember how he told you” (Luke 24:5–6).

The women don’t even have a chance to ask what happened! The messengers prompt them to dig deep into their memories in the light of this new thing God has done. “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again” (vss. 6–7).

Remember? Yes, I do remember Jesus talking about dying and rising; I remember his face when he called Lazarus from his tomb; I remember the ancient promises of God to our people, promises to hear our cries for help and save us.

In that moment of remembering, the women experienced God’s power to do what God said would be accomplished. Without seeing any proof, they knew that Jesus lived! Without knowing how, they trusted that God was at work honoring the promise to set captives free!

The roots of this unique event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus the Christ, reach deep into the soil of God’s word. Buried prophecies, bits and pieces of ideas, and ancient stories take on new meaning in the light of God’s action at Easter.

The first clear reference to resurrection in the Old Testament comes in Daniel 12:1–3: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (v. 2). The book of Daniel was written about 165 years before Jesus lived. Daniel’s vision of a time of awakening and judgment was a word of hope to the Jewish people living under persecution.

Other prophets had long used the idea of resurrection to express God’s power to save the people. Isaiah: “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” (26:19). Ezekiel: “Thus says the Lord God: I am

going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. . . . I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live” (37:12, 14).

About 200 years after Daniel wrote, the Jewish people were living in their promised land, but under the occupation of Rome. One group of Jews, the Sadducees, rejected the idea of resurrection and tried to trap Jesus with a question about a woman who was married seven times. In the resurrection, they asked, whose wife will she be? Jesus went to the root of the matter: “You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God . . . as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses . . . how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is God not of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:24, 26–27).

These and other Scriptures witnessed to God’s desire to use power for life over death. But they lay dormant in the memory of God’s people until after Jesus’ resurrection, when they took on new significance.

Active Roots

Even though we cannot see them doing their work, roots have a dynamic relationship with their environment. Roots coexist with bugs and worms and fungi. Roots push deeper and deeper through the soil, making their way around stones and rocks. They even grow root hairs to increase their surface area and draw in more water and minerals for the plant.

The story of Easter morning may be so familiar to us that we have lost sight of how life-changing that event was for the first believers. Standing before the empty tomb, the women had few ways to make sense of the situation: Someone must have stolen or moved the body, they concluded. But once they fell at the feet of the risen Lord in his resurrected body and once he spoke to them (Matthew 28:9), they could think

beyond earth-bound logic.

First, the believers proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus as unique in all history.² The disciples had seen Jesus himself bring people back to life (Jairus's daughter, the young man of Nain, and Lazarus), but the restoration of these people's lives meant resuming the same life and facing death all over again.

When Jesus appeared to the women and men in those days after Easter, he was different. He bore the scars of crucifixion on his body, scars that could be touched, yet this body also could appear and disappear as he chose. The earliest Christian preaching affirmed, "God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:24).

Second, faith in the God of the resurrection turned the lives of the believers upside down. Before Easter, resurrection was a general idea that applied to a future last day when God would judge the nations. On that "third day," the resurrection became a historical event with witnesses. The disciples became urgent, fearless witnesses who traveled far and wide to tell what they had seen and heard.

About 20 years after the resurrection, Paul wrote

to the believers in Corinth, stating, "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Another 20 years later when the Gospel authors wrote their stories, they included the earliest appearances of Jesus to Mary Magdalene and the other women.

God was doing a totally new thing! Death was overcome! The Messiah was revealed to God's people! Jesus was raised up to eternal glory! God's promises for the future had broken into the present time!

If the disciples had only imagined the resurrection, or somehow shared hallucinations together, the church would never have developed. Believers would have been dismissed as misguided or crazy. Accused of "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6), they

continued on page 40

this month's **QUESTION**

Go to www.elca.org/wo/lwt to enter your response.
(Results will appear in the July/August 2003 issue)

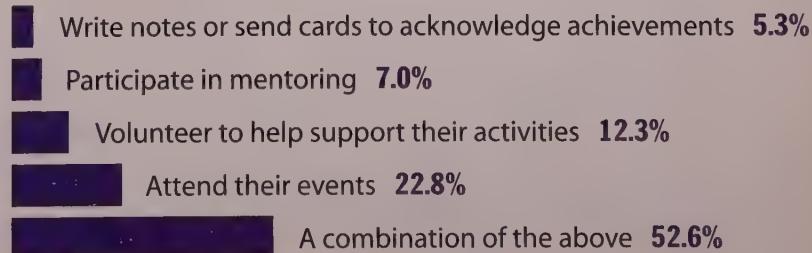
How many times a month do you write someone a letter?

- A. Zero—I just call
- B. Zero—I just use e-mail now
- C. Once or twice
- D. Three times or more

Results from Question of the Month

(November 2002)

Q: What is the primary way you encourage and celebrate the youth in your church and community?





Romantic love. Perfect for the movies that some people watch over and over again until they know the protagonists' stories as well as their own lives: *Casablanca*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Titanic*. Featured in the great Greek myths: Penelope faithfully unraveling her weaving to forestall her suitors, who circle her like sharks when her beloved Odysseus is kept away by circumstances and fortune. Romantic love is the stuff of poetry. "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom," wrote Shakespeare more than 300 years ago.

Romantic love, in all its jazzy variations, lifts us from monotony and transforms us, to be sure. The cinder maid turns into the princess, the nobody into a beloved. But what about friendship?

There are plenty of famous buddies—Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Ethel and Lucy, and the cast of *Friends*. But these relationships are less dramatic than those of romantic pairs—they involve tales of parallel paths taken and of one person bailing the other out of amusingly embarrassing situations.

Once in a while, a poignant story of friendship comes along—like *Brian's Song*—but it usually involves one friend dying. Apparently the ordinary life of friendship lacks sufficient drama. Friendship is the steady hum of the washing machine or the car. It's the stage manager who works behind the scenes setting up props so that the opera star can sing her aria. Or is it?

WHAT'S A FRIEND?

As I thought about friendship, I found myself struggling with clichés and empty phrases. A friend in

need is a friend indeed. To have a friend, be a friend. A career as a greeting card writer unfolded before my eyes.

I turned to my old ally, the dictionary, which often turns up wisdom in words' Latin or Old English roots. The first definition of friendship seemed strangely

I walked away discouraged. Then I realized: The child was right. Friendship is "Luke." Not his Luke, of course, who probably snorts milk out of his nose and watches SpongeBob SquarePants endlessly, but a singular, irreplaceable person—to you.

Erase "Luke" and fill in your choice of name here.

by Clare La Plante

FRIENDS FOR LIFE

uninspiring: "One attached to another by affection, or esteem." The second definition made me laugh: "One who is not hostile." Apparently, you have a true friend if she doesn't take a kitchen knife to your throat over dinner.

Salvation came in the form of my seven-year-old godchild. I wanted to find someone who was still uncorrupted by clichés, advertising's view of things, and jaded relationships, so I asked him early one Sunday morning: "What is a friend?" He thought for a minute, sitting at his dining room table with his chin propped in his hands. Then he replied, "Luke." I was startled at first: Luke? The Gospel? And then I realized he meant his playmate Luke. Oh, dear, I thought. This isn't going to save the day!

So I asked him to think again, to come up with something more profound. He lost his confidence, unfortunately—as people do when they know they're not really being listened to—and began parroting other sources. In a recent Scooby Doo movie, he said, one of the characters (Scooby? Shaggy?) said that "friends don't quit." Hmm, I thought, not bad. But I didn't want to steal from a movie, especially one with a cartoon dog for its main character.

I will write in Jeanette, or Caroline. Maybe you'll write in Mary, or Andy, or Alice, or Peter, or Nora, or Beth, or Deb, or Nancy. These friends likely share similar traits: You trust them. They can keep a secret. Or they make you laugh. Perhaps they are graceful and giving and articulate. Or maybe not. Maybe your best friend belches at the table, forgets your birthday, and talks too much, or not enough.

FRIENDS AND FREEDOM

It doesn't matter, and that's the beauty of it. A friend is someone God created and no one can duplicate, and whose imperfections suit yours just fine. You like to spend time with her. You miss her when she's gone. You look forward to talking with him, and often entrust him with pieces of yourself that no one else has. I guess *Webster's* had it right with the first definition: You are attached to him or her through affection.

That's it—you're not legally bound. We don't get married to our friends, at least not usually; we aren't bound by familial or legal ties. You can walk out on a friend any time and not have to pay alimony. You don't have to save for your friend's college tuition. You don't have to let friends move back into the house

when they're finding themselves at 30. You do what you do with them because you are attached merely by esteem—or love.

Imagine all our relationships—those with our siblings, parents, children, or life partners—based on friendship. If we can get this kind of peace in our home lives—free of guilt, obligation, and judgment—imagine the potential for world peace. We're each part of the puzzle of the great map of the world. How you fit into your section is related to the interlocking of the pieces that surround you. The world can be connected by one degree of separation, friend by friend by friend.

Watch children at play. They make friends in the most unexpected places. Visit a kindergarten class, and watch white and black, boy and girl, introverted and extroverted, together, in different play corners, huddled and trusting and loving. Imagine adults with the capacity to love just on the basis of heart, in Jerusalem, Belfast, or Washington, D.C.

FRIENDS FOREVER

We aren't limited in our friendships. Friends come in different packages. Nature can be our friend. A dog. Those who have died. Friends will come and go, but the friendships never leave us. We'd connect deeply with them again and again, no matter where, no matter when, like homing pigeons of the heart. Take a group of people, change their names, faces, and geography—and throw them back 100 years in time. I think those friends would still find each other.

Of course, friendship has its dark side—betrayal. Having our secrets told, being abandoned during difficult times. This usually happens, I think, when we accumulate friends—like notches on a belt—but prohibit access to our souls. Instead, they become accessories, pretty hangings or decorative wreaths. Girls in junior high know this trick. Your stock rises and falls

with the number of friends, and which ones, you have in your clique. We can use friends as strategically as generals moving troops.

Or we may use them for convenience, the great twenty-first-century siren call. A mutually convenient relationship can be lifesaving if you're going through a tough time or a life passage. But real life isn't convenient. It's often drawn out and complicated. If we cannot show another who we really are underneath our own window dressing and masks, then we deprive another of our own unique spirit and calling as friend.

This may be the toughest roadblock of all: If you are truly to be a friend, you must admit to your own self that you are that same irreplaceable person who is necessary to the spirit of another. Until we cultivate that relationship with our own spirit, we will be grasping at straws, or our friends, using them as we've probably been used ourselves.

Instead, true friendship is the ship that sails away from the shore and doesn't care what cargo it carries. It takes the risk. It's fueled by compassion—sympathetic consciousness—or enveloping acceptance. The greatest hindrance to experiencing true and real friendship—with our friends, spouses, partners, children, or the world—is not being able to be that friend to ourselves. So I come back to a cliché at the end of this piece: To have a friend, be a friend. To which I'd add—to yourself.

Let yourself hold God's vision of you—imperfect to be sure, but precious, sacred, and beautiful. Then offer it to a friend. "You may call God love, you may call God goodness. But the best name for God is compassion," says the fourteenth-century German mystic Meister Eckhart.

And, I will add, "friend."

Clare La Plante is a writer and reporter in the Chicago area.

DOES YOUR CONGREGATION OR WOMEN'S GROUP LIFT UP THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF YOUNGER MEMBERS WHO ARE PERHAPS ATHLETES, ARTISTS, OR PERFORMERS? HOW DOES YOUR GROUP INTERACT WITH LOCAL STUDENTS?

At our church we have two women who search the local school papers, as well as the daily and weekly papers, for news on the accomplishments of all our members. This is not an easy task because we have members from four very large school districts. The two then update the bulletin board weekly with the latest news of positive achievers. These two women, Marlys Ruud and Meredith Pyles, provide a great ministry.

Janet Nelson—Ham Lake, Minn.

Glen Cary Lutheran Church

Our church held a young people's talent show to help raise money for sponsoring a family from Africa. Those attending were really amazed at the talents of a ballet dancer, clarinet player, and three singers! The talent show raised around \$3,000. We really learned to appreciate our youths' talent.

Myrna McNatt—Middleton, Wis.

Advent Lutheran Church

Our congregation supports the youth in our community by setting up a table of snacks on the sidewalk outside the church, which is on a main road near the high school. Once a week, a few adults station themselves at tables in the morning and chat with students and offer homemade cookies and juice as they pass by. The students asked why we were doing this. What a chance for ministry!

Kathy Rock—Ardsley, N.Y.

Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church

Our church organist accompanies junior and senior high school students in district music contests. Many have mastered instrumental or vocal music appropriate for worship, so she invites them to play at Sunday services. They have been warmly received by our members, who greet and encourage them after the services.

Laura M. Stellhorn—Sandusky, Ohio

Zion Lutheran Church

We recognize the talents of our youth with a yearly dinner to raise money to send them to Lutheran music camp, youth conventions, and Bible camps. Our small rural church has sent six girls to Lutheran music camp and three dozen students to other events in the last three years.

Yvonne M. Page—Calhan, Colo.

St. Paul Lutheran Church

A group of our churchwomen makes quilts for Lutheran World Relief, as well as one for each graduating high school senior and each child who is baptized. This year, a very young girl who was baptized wrote: "Thank you for your support and for making my baptism the best event of my life. I love the quilt you gave for my baptism very much. When I am scared, I wrap myself with the quilt, and I feel Jesus hug me and love me through the quilt. No more scare! Thank you very much! God bless you all!"

Connie Bliss—Anacortes, Wash.



WHEN HAVE YOU HAD TO REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE A "CHILD OF GOD"?

When asked about my religious preference, I always answered what I thought people wanted to hear. But after drug rehab, I learned to identify who I really am by my surroundings. I am surrounded by life, trees, choices, decisions, and so on—all created by God. I realized that I, too, am part of my surroundings and created by God; therefore, I am God's child. Every day I know the truth. Every day I recognize myself as a child of God, especially now, when I am in jail, serving time for my poor decisions and distance from God. I am almost done with my sentence, but by the grace of God, this time has been good for me—I know that God loves me.

Christina Luther—Boise, Idaho

Ihave had a full and satisfying life journey, progressing through the roles of child, student, sweetheart, wife, mother, and grandmother, ever surrounded by love and a deep sense of personal fulfillment. Each new situation was better than the one before, and then stepping into the roles of retired teacher, senior citizen, and once again special sweetheart seemed the best change of all! In retirement, my husband and I had time for a new closeness and happily took on a simplified lifestyle after many years of managing a busy family schedule and demanding careers. I've reveled in the experience!

But nothing, absolutely nothing, prepared me for

the unwelcome title of widow, which was unexpectedly thrust upon me. At one point in my grief, I cried out in loneliness and need, claiming total dependence as a child of God, secure only in God's love and strength as I moved into this newest role. I recognize how blessed I am to have known the constant presence of God throughout life. No matter the role, I have always been—and still am—a loved and nurtured child of God!

Berdella Johnson—Grantsburg, Wis.

When I was a senior in high school, I invited a school friend to join me at worship one Sunday. Afterward, I asked as I usually did, "Well, how did you like the service?" She said it was fine, but added, "You didn't have an altar call. How do you know if you're saved?" That question really bothered me. I didn't want to ask my pastor (also my dad), so I kept that nagging question in the back of my mind for a couple of years.

Then one summer I attended a Lutheran student convention. After one of the Bible study sessions I asked the leader, a pastor, "How do I know if I have been saved?" He asked whether I had been baptized. When I assured him that I was baptized as an infant, he replied, "Then you are a child of God. You don't have anything to worry about." Of course. How could I have forgotten? I have nothing to worry about—I am God's child.

Jane Rieke—Seattle, Wash.

CORRECTION

Author Sue Gamelin has made this correction to the Thankoffering service in the November 2002 issue: "Old Dr." Leonard Kendall was not the president of Gustavus Adolphus College; his son, "Young Dr." John Kendall, was. Leonard Kendall was the president of the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Church.

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\$25,000

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Ages: 77 & 76

Gift Value: \$25,000

Annuity Rate: 6.7%

Annual Payout: \$1,675

Tax-free portion: \$1,115.55

Charitable Deduction: \$8,373.95



REACHING OUT, REACHING IN

A JOURNEY OF INDIVIDUALS TOGETHER IN FAITH

by Margaret G. Payne

The invention of child safety seats was an important step forward in automotive safety, but it came with drawbacks, too. I recently was riding in the front passenger seat of my daughter's car; she was driving, and my three-year-old granddaughter rode quietly in the back, strapped into her comfortable, toy-surrounded car seat. But all was not well. As the evening darkness deepened, we heard a wail from the little one in the car seat: "Hey, you guys! I'm back here all alone, and nobody is touching me!"

Psychologists may not have explored the loneliness of children's car seats, but we know that removing people from the touch of others for too long is not healthy. We need contact and communication even more when the darkness deepens. We need to be touched regularly to stay connected to other human beings and to draw love and strength from that connection.

Right now many people in our church feel alone in their views on human sexuality. They feel out of touch with other parts of the church. Whether they are experi-

encing the pain of exclusion or fearing that the church is changing in ways that they cannot understand, they are isolated and lonely. Grown-ups do not usually speak up about their needs as readily as three-year-olds, so they often remain silent in their isolation and fear. When they do talk, they choose their conversation partners carefully because they are afraid of angry or defensive reactions from fellow Christians.

One important goal for the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality is to reduce the distance and isolation that have developed



between factions in our church that are strapped into different opinions about sexuality and unable to touch one another. As the darkness of seemingly irreconcilable differences deepens, we need each other in the Body of Christ more than ever. We need to gather and talk and listen and catch a glimpse of Jesus in the face of someone with whom we disagree. Only then will we be able to find God's way for us through these difficult issues surrounding human sexuality.

HOW DID THIS CONVERSATION AND STUDY BEGIN?

At the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2001 a lively debate about the role of gay and lesbian people in the life of the church took place. The exchange of very different views on the subject made it clear that no resolution could be reached

at that time. The assembly voted to ask the church to study two separate but related issues. By 2005, resolutions are to be brought back to the assembly that would consider the blessing of same-sex unions and the possibility of ordaining a gay or lesbian person in a committed relationship. (At the present time, a gay or lesbian person may be ordained but must remain celibate, and the blessing of same-sex relationships is not sanctioned.) By 2007, a new ELCA social statement addressing a wide range of issues of human sexuality is to be developed.

As we pursue this study, it is important to remember that it was initiated by a decision of the laypeople and clergy who gathered in Indianapolis in the summer of 2001. This grassroots request came from people in the pews and from pastors who seek to provide

guidance and pastoral care for all their members.

Although sexuality is a difficult and emotional issue, many people believe that the time has come for the ELCA to make a strong statement about the values that we embrace as Lutherans. We must overcome our reluctance to talk about our human sexuality. The commitment and courage to reach out to one another and discuss these matters will diminish the power of this issue to divide us and hinder our witness. The only way that we can pierce the darkness of disagreement with the light of Christ is to engage in respectful discussion with other brothers and sisters in the church.

WHAT IS THE TASK FORCE FOR ELCA STUDIES ON SEXUALITY?

The Rev. Dr. James M. Childs Jr. was selected to serve as the direc-

tor of the studies. Childs is a professor of theology and ethics at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. He has taken a leave of absence from his academic duties to direct this ELCA study. Highly regarded as one who has the wisdom and courage to guide this work, Childs is deeply committed to the unity of the church. He has named the study "Journey Together Faithfully." This title reflects his awareness that we cannot simply disagree and remain isolated from one another but are called to travel together toward resolution for the sake of our common witness. We take this journey together, with other brothers and sisters in Christ, and together we will be faithful in our journeying—faithful to God, to Scripture, to the church and its tradition, and to one another's experience of God's gift of faith and life.

The task force comprises 14 people who represent a wide range of opinions on the topic of sexuality. There are women and men, gay and straight, lay and clergy, younger and older, from different ethnic backgrounds, and we share the commitment to work together for a solution to the apparent impasse on matters of human sexuality that is so divisive and potentially damaging for

THERE IS NO PREORDAINED ENDING TO THIS PROCESS AND NO PREDETERMINED DECISION THAT WILL BE MADE.

our church. The task force seeks to model a way of being in dialogue with one another that is open and respectful of all participants. We listen carefully to one another even when we think our minds are made up. We hope that this same kind of listening and discussion will take place across the entire church. Unless we commit ourselves to listening with a deep attention to the story and spirit of the other person, we will remain alone and isolated in our own opinions.

WHAT WILL THE TASK FORCE DO?
After beginning to get to know one another and gaining an awareness of the work before us, the task force produced a study document that was sent to all ELCA congregations in the fall of 2002. Titled "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions," it outlines the beliefs that we hold in common as ELCA Lutherans. Its format

provides introductory worship for each segment, a statement of beliefs, and then questions for discussion. Using this document in study groups will provide a foundation for the task before us. We can remember the many ways in which we agree, and we can learn to talk about sexuality. Then we will be better prepared for the discussion of homosexuality and equipped to explore respectfully the areas in which we disagree.

Over the next few months, the task force will hold consultations with a variety of groups. It will hear from members of the gay and lesbian community, from biblical scholars and theologians, and from scientists and psychologists. It will hear from people who believe that we must change the policies of the ELCA and from people who believe that we must stay with our present policies. After more meetings and discussion, the task force will produce an interim report that will be provided to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in the summer of 2003.

After that, in the fall of 2003, a study document will be distributed to congregations churchwide. It will provide information to be used in discussing the issues surrounding the role of gay and lesbian people in the church. A series of hearings will be sponsored

throughout the church during 2003 and 2004 so that members will have plenty of opportunities to hear and speak on the decisions that we face as a church.

Members of the task force recently shared hopes for our work together that go far beyond the reading of endless pages on the subject of sexuality and the shaping of resolutions to be considered by assemblies of the church. We long to be faithful to God's call to us in this work and to do no harm to Christ's church. We want to grow in our understanding of the Bible, tradition, and one another. We want to find a new path that will help us discuss difficult issues together and celebrate all the areas of agreement. We want to provide a stronger witness of the church to the world by the faithful way in which we touch and respect and engage one another.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

The churchwide executive board of Women of the ELCA has endorsed this study and the work of the task force. Synodical women's organizations and congregational units have an important role to play in the work before us. If women will commit themselves to respectful and honest discussion over the next two years, then we will be able to face difficult decisions with a unity and shared concern for the church that will ensure the most constructive outcome.

There is no preordained ending to this process and no predetermined decision that will be made. We trust that God will work through the love and commitment of many people to guide us toward solutions that have not yet been envisioned and that will enable us to stay connected to one another in our love for Christ's church.

We ask for your prayers and support in this process. If we reach out to one another, sharing study, stories, and learnings, then we will reduce the isolation that many people have experienced and find the connections that have been hidden by our misunderstandings. We trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to sanctify and guide us as we journey together faithfully into the future that is safely in God's hand.

Rev. Margaret G. Payne was elected bishop of the New England Synod in 2000. A graduate of Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pa., she received her master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. She and her husband, John, live in Shelburne, Mass. They have four children and two grandchildren.

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Session 8

The Time of Trial



by Mary Hinkle

Study Text

John 18:12–19:16

Theme Verse

“Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’” (John 18:37)

Overview

After Jesus is arrested, he is brought before the Jewish leaders, Annas and Caiaphas, and then the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Ostensibly, it is Jesus who is on trial, yet as the story unfolds, the tables turn. In this session, we see how Peter, Pilate, and the Jewish authorities also face their own time of trial during the trial of Jesus, and we reflect on how courage and fear may be part of our own life of faith.

Opening

The hymn “Ah, Holy Jesus” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 123) reflects themes from the story of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. Stanzas from the hymn will appear throughout this session. Begin the session by singing or saying the first stanza (below) and praying the prayer that follows.

Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended
That man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.

“Lord Jesus, you have called us to follow you. Grant that our love may not grow cold in your service, and that we may not fail or deny you in the hour of trial” (*LBW*, p. 19).

Peter on Trial

Read John 18:12–28. While Jesus is being brought under armed guard to the Jewish authorities, Peter is facing his own time of trial.

All four Gospels tell the story of Peter’s strong commitment to stand with Jesus. All four Gospels also narrate the news of his failure. Just a few hours before Jesus was arrested, in an echo of Jesus’ own words, Peter had promised him, “I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:37).

Jesus had described himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:15), and he also said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13). Peter wanted to follow Jesus in such a demonstration of love, yet when his commitment is tested, he cannot even say that he knows Jesus. Peter denies Jesus three times.

1. Peter had been so fervently supportive of Jesus earlier (see John 13:36–38 and 18:10–11). Why is he so unwilling to admit his connection to Jesus in the high priest's courtyard? What changed?

While the disciple is in the courtyard being questioned about the teacher—and flunking the test!—the teacher is inside being questioned about his disciples and his teaching (John 18:19). Jesus says that he has always taught openly and has done nothing in secret. His bold and true testimony before Annas contrasts starkly with Peter's lies.

Go Deeper

Read John 21:15–19. Some people see in these verses a chance for Peter to receive Christ's forgiveness for his threefold denial. Three times, the risen Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" and three times Peter replies, "Yes," to which Jesus responds, "Feed my sheep." These verses also point to the fact that Peter will be martyred because of his commitment to Jesus and his love for him. In fact, Peter eventually did suffer death by crucifixion. Does the information about Peter's manner of death or the conversation between Peter and the risen Jesus change the way you think about Peter's denial of Jesus? If so, how?

The second verse of "Ah, Holy Jesus" encourages the one singing to identify with Peter's experience of denying Jesus.

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?

Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
I crucified thee.

Pilate on Trial

The Jewish authorities take Jesus to Pilate, the highest Roman official in Judea. During Jesus' trial before Pilate, the action is divided into seven scenes and is played out on two stages. Back and forth Pilate goes: indoors to speak to Jesus, then outdoors to speak to the chief priests and others who have brought Jesus to him. Of all the characters in the story, Pilate has the most worldly power. At one point, Pilate talks about his power explicitly by saying to Jesus, "Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" (John 19:10; see also John 10:18). Yet his back-and-forth motion makes him seem more like the wooden bird in a cuckoo clock than like the Roman governor of Judea.

2. Why don't the Jewish authorities come inside Pilate's headquarters to participate in the trial of Jesus (see John 18:28)?

Read John 18:28–38. One of the ways that Jesus puts Pilate "on trial" during this scene is by becoming the one asking the questions. Look, for example, at the exchange between the two in John 18:33–35.

Pilate: "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Pilate: "I am not a Jew, am I?"

In the Gospel of John, "the Jews" as a group have a reputation for failing to recognize the testimony of Jesus as one who has come from God, although we remember, of course, that Jesus, his disciples, and his friends, like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, are also all Jews. Pilate

says, “I am not a Jew, am I?” and in one sense, he is right: he is not a member of the people of Israel; he is a Roman. Yet in another sense, he is acting like those who have not recognized in Jesus the power of their God. In fact, the issue in Jesus’ trial of Pilate is whether Pilate will recognize the truth and acknowledge it or will be blind and deaf to the one who stands before him. Pilate’s question to Jesus, “I am not a Jew, am I?” is something like the question from the Pharisees after they listen to the testimony of the man born blind, yet do not believe: “Surely we are not blind, are we?” (John 9:40).

In John 18:37, Jesus gives Pilate a thumbnail sketch of his teaching. We have seen these themes before in the Gospel. Compare Jesus’ words in verse 37 with the texts listed here.

3. **In his exchanges with Jesus, does Pilate hear Jesus’ voice (John 10:27) and so receive eternal life, or does he “come under judgment” (John 5:24)? What do you think, and why do you think so?**

In stanza 3 of “Ah, Holy Jesus,” we sing about the Good Shepherd laying down his life, even for those who fail to heed his voice:

Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;
The slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered;
For man’s atonement, while he nothing heedeth,
God intercedeth.

The Jewish Leaders on Trial

Peter is on trial to see whether he will stand with Jesus or deny him in a time of danger. Pilate is on trial to see whether he can recognize the truth and respond to it appropriately. The

Jewish authorities are on trial to see whether they can remain faithful to their God and God’s self-revelation.

The Jewish leaders certainly start out acting as if faithfulness to God and God’s law is important to them. They do not want to enter a Gentile dwelling just before Passover, for fear of incurring ritual impurity and needing then to postpone their celebration of the Passover feast.¹ It is difficult, however, not to see a certain level of hypocrisy in their fastidious behavior, since “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13) is also part of God’s law, and these leaders have already decided to put Jesus to death, even though they did not find him guilty of a capital crime (John 11:45–53).

Sometimes in this story, those who are interacting with Pilate are called just “the Jews.” At other times, as at 19:6 and 15, John makes it explicit that those talking with the Roman governor are the chief priests and the temple police. There is no role for “the crowd” in John’s version of Jesus’ trial. The Jewish people as a whole are not those responsible for Jesus’ death. Instead, a group of leaders of the Jews engineers his trial and sentencing.

4. **Read John 18:38–40. Pilate offers to release Jesus, but the leaders clamor for Barabbas instead. John tells us that “Barabbas was a bandit” (18:40, New Revised Standard Version; the New International Version offers an unfortunate paraphrase here—“Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion”—that mutes an important echo of chapter 10). Look at John 10:1 and 10:8 for the evangelist’s only other references to a bandit, or *lestes* in Greek. The NRSV highlights this identical**

vocabulary by translating the Greek word as “bandit” in all three places.² Are the people safe with such a person?

Read John 19:1–16. Pilate brutalizes Jesus and then mocks the Jewish leaders by dressing Jesus in a purple robe and presenting him to those outside as their king. It appears that Pilate sees no threat in Jesus. In fact he says three times, “I find no case against him.” And Pilate seems to be having fun pointing out the irony in anyone thinking that a bruised and bloodied weakling like the man Jesus would be a danger to an established world power.

But those who have turned Jesus over to Pilate try to convince Pilate that Jesus is a political threat: “Everyone who claims to be a king sets

himself against the emperor” (John 19:12). They argue that Pilate has a duty to execute Jesus because he is an enemy of Rome. Pilate asks, “Shall I crucify your King?” and the chief priests respond, “We have no king but the emperor” (John 19:15–16). With this statement, the Jewish authorities convict themselves of ignoring not only the revelation of God in Jesus Christ but also the revelation of God in the Scriptures.

5. **Who was Israel’s true king, before and above all those who were human authorities? For help here, refer to Psalm 96:10; 97:1; 99:1. You may also want to look at the story in 1 Samuel, when Israel first asks for a king like the kings that other nations have. In 1 Samuel 8:7, God speaks to Samuel about Israel’s request.**

Theme	John 18:37	Texts related to the theme
Jesus' origin	“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world,	“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Jesus, knowing “that he had come from God and was going to God,” washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:3).
Jesus' work	to testify to the truth.	Jesus is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He says, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). And he says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
Right response to Jesus	Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”	“Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish” (John 10:27–28).

Save Us from the Time of Trial

With the exception of Jesus, all the characters who face a time of trial in John 18–19 fail the test before them. Peter denies Jesus. Pilate neither hears nor sees the truth in Jesus. The Jewish leaders trade away their one identity as subjects of the Most High in order to claim, “We have no king but the emperor.”

6. **Can you identify with any of these characters? Have you ever had a chance to do the right thing and “blown it”? What happened? With another chance, is there anything you might do differently?**
7. **In the context of the various trials in John 18–19, what does it mean for you to pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Save us from the time of trial”?**

Closing

Close the session by praying together the Lord’s Prayer and saying or singing the last two stanzas of “Ah, Holy Jesus.”

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

For me, kind Jesus, was thine incarnation,
Thy mortal sorrow, and thy life’s oblation;
Thy death of anguish and thy bitter Passion,
For my salvation.

Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee;
Think on thy pity and thy love unswerving,
Not my deserving.

Looking Ahead

Next month, in our last session of this year’s study, we will read the story of Jesus’ resurrection and his appearances to “his own.” We will focus on Jesus’ appearances to Mary Magdalene and Thomas. Study texts are John 20:1–18 and John 20:24–31.

RESOURCE MATERIAL

Scenes in Jesus’ Trial before Pilate

Although Jesus and the Jewish authorities have spent much of the Gospel addressing one another—chapters 5–8 include many conversations between Jesus and his adversaries—during Jesus’ trial, they never speak directly to one another. Pilate acts as a kind of “go-between” in the trial. As John tells the story of Jesus before Pilate, the trial has seven distinct scenes, with the action moving back and forth from outside Pilate’s headquarters to inside them.

Jesus as King of the Jews

In all the Gospels, Jesus is crucified as a political criminal under the charge, “King of the Jews.” Each of the evangelists highlights the title in different ways.

In the Gospel of Matthew, wise men from the east come into Jerusalem not long after Jesus is born and ask, “Where is the one born King of the Jews?” Their question inspires fear among the citizens of Jerusalem, who know that the present king of the Jews, Herod the Great, will not take kindly to the announcement of a new king (see Matthew 2:1–12). Later in the Gospel,

Jesus is crucified under the title that the magi had first used to find him.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus often speaks in parables about the kingdom of God, but the first person to use the title “king” for Jesus is Pilate, when he asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (Mark 15:3). Later, at the crucifixion, the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus, saying, “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:32). The soldiers, too, ridicule Jesus with a purple cloak, a crown of thorns, and the title that is also placed over him on the cross: “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Mark 15:18).

Luke also reports the detail that the soldiers mock Jesus by saying to him, “If you are the

King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:37). But in Luke, the mockery Jesus endures at the cross contrasts with the conversion of one of the thieves crucified with him, who refers to Jesus’ kingly reign, saying to him, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

John’s Gospel includes a scene, just after Jesus has fed a multitude of people, in which he has to hide from the people because he has become so popular. “When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:15). We hear no more about Jesus being made king until Pilate asks him whether he is a king. When Pilate

Text	Setting	Action
1 18:29–32	Outside	Jesus is brought to Pilate. Pilate inquires about the charge against him.
2 18:33–38a	Inside	Pilate asks Jesus whether he is King of the Jews.
3 18:38b–40	Outside	“I find no case against him,” Pilate says, and asks whether he should release the King of the Jews.
4 19:1–3	Inside	Jesus is flogged, dressed in mock royal attire, and then brought out to the people.
5 19:4–7	Outside	Pilate presents Jesus, and the chief priests cry, “Crucify!”
6 19:8–12	Inside	Pilate and Jesus discuss Jesus’ origin and power.
7 19:13–16	Outside	Pilate brings Jesus outside again to shouts of “Crucify!” Pilate asks, “Shall I crucify your King?” and the chief priests reply, “We have no king but the emperor.”

charges Jesus with being “King of the Jews,” and therefore insubordinate to Roman rule, he is speaking a deeper truth than he is aware.

John reports that the title placed above Jesus on the cross was written in three languages. Aramaic, a relative of Hebrew, would be the everyday spoken language among Jews. Latin was the language of courts, politics, and the military. Greek was the language of the marketplace. In each of these languages—and, Christians would say, over all these realms of life—Jesus is proclaimed king.

Pilate

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36, serving under the emperor Tiberius. His role was to see that taxes were paid to Rome and that Roman rule was administered in the area. Most of what we know about Pilate comes from the New Testament. However, the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote near the end of the first century, tells three additional stories of Pilate’s interaction with the Jews.

Early in his time as governor, Pilate provoked his subjects by posting in Jerusalem, under the cover of night, standards with the image of Caesar on them. The Jews believed that God’s commandment against graven images had been transgressed, and both city dwellers and people from the countryside gathered in Jerusalem to demonstrate against the standards. When threatened with Roman military action, the Jews “fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed” (*Jewish Wars* 2:174).³ Pilate was impressed enough by

this demonstration “of superstition” that he had the standards removed.

Pilate’s next misstep occurred when he used funds associated with the temple to build an aqueduct that carried water through a cemetery.⁴ Both the misappropriation of the temple’s money and the ritual impurity of the water rankled the Jews. Again, the people demonstrated, but this time, Pilate had undercover police infiltrate the crowd, and when he gave the signal, the troops began to beat members of the crowd. Josephus says that many of the demonstrators were either beaten to death or trampled as they tried to flee (*Jewish Wars* 2:175–77).

Several years after Jesus’ death, Pilate ordered a crowd of armed Samaritans to be attacked and many of those taken prisoner to be killed. His action was so heavy-handed that the Samaritan senate complained to the Roman authority in Syria, and Pilate was recalled from his post in Judea (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18:85–89).⁵

Notes

1. Numbers 9:10–11 requires those who are ritually unclean at the time of Passover to celebrate a month later. These verses mention only corpse impurity (the ritual state that occurs when one does the good and necessary work of preparing the dead for burial), but entering a Gentile dwelling, such as Pilate’s household, might bring with it a similar ritual impurity and thus require postponing one’s celebration of Passover.

2. The New King James Version also translates the Greek word in John 10:1, 8, and 18:40 with the same English word in each place, but it chooses “robber” rather than “bandit.”

3. *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), 609.

4. Daniel R. Schwartz, “Pontius Pilate,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday), 5:399.

5. *The Works of Josephus*, 482.

Lutheran Woman Today

2003–2004 Bible Study Introduction Events

EACH YEAR, SEVERAL GROUPS AROUND THE COUNTRY INVITE THE AUTHOR OF THE UPCOMING *LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY* BIBLE STUDY TO PRESENT AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT HE OR SHE HAS WRITTEN. These one-day or one-and-a-half-day seminars are a great way for Bible study participants to become more familiar with the upcoming study and to enjoy the fellowship of other Women of the ELCA participants from their region.

The 2003–2004 study focuses on Paul's letters to the fledgling Christian communities. Author Robin Mattison, associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, will be on hand to present her overview of the study, answer questions, provide additional insight, and chat informally with participants.

April 10–11

Thursday–Friday

Wartburg Theological Seminary

Dubuque, Iowa

For more information, contact:

Ms. Linden Wendle

563-589-0324

LWENDLE@wartburgseminary.edu

June 17–18

Tuesday–Wednesday

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Berkeley, California

For more information, contact:

Gary Pence

925-352-9953*

gpence@plts.edu

August 16

Saturday

Oregon Synodical Women's Organization

For more information, contact:

Jan Rounds

503-771-1328

jmroun@spiritone.com

May 1–2

Thursday–Friday

Luther Theological Seminary

St. Paul, Minnesota

For more information, contact:

Peter Sethre

651-641-3429

psethre@luthersem.edu

June 22–26

Sunday–Thursday

Luther Crest Bible Camp

Women's Week

Alexandria, Minnesota

For more information, contact:

Rev. Arden Norum

8231 County Rd. 11 NE

Alexandria, MN 56308

320-846-2431

lcbc@luthercrest.org

August 23

Saturday

Washington Synodical Women's Organization

For more information, contact:

Jan Nelson

253-833-0886

berzhug@msn.com

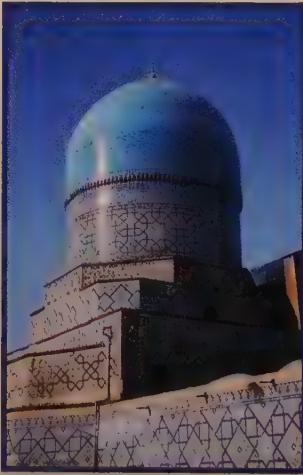
Several additional events are still being planned. The information listed above was current at press time but may change. Please check the *LWT* Web site (www.elca.org/wo/lwt) frequently, or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2743, for the most up-to-date information.

MUSLIM

Storing Up Riches for Heaven

MOTHERS

by Nelly van Doorn-Harder



When we die, only three things remain: the blessing of the alms we gave, our knowledge, and our good children who continue to pray for us.—Ibu Sulistyowati, teacher in an elementary school and head of a Muslim education program for children

EDITORS' NOTE: News from around the globe swirls in and out of our daily lives, yet often we have little knowledge of the real lives of the people in the places we are hearing about. *LWT* asked Nelly van Doorn-Harder to share with us some of her experiences living and working in Islamic countries. We asked her to offer insight into the lives of women and specifically what it means to raise children in such a setting. Recognizing that each of the countries where Islam is practiced has its own unique customs and characteristics, we hope nonetheless that this article will lead to better understanding of our Islamic sisters.

A MUSLIM MOTHER FROM JAVA

"Ibu Shinto, what is your greatest goal in life?"

"That my children will grow up to be honest and virtuous Muslims."

"How can you prepare them for that?"

"It is a long process that starts at the time of conception. When I sleep with my husband, we invoke the name of God so that the devil will be kept far from the seed that is about to enter my womb. The moment I know that I am pregnant I start to fast and perform the extra prayers for the fast and try to keep that up during the entire pregnancy. We believe that God implants three essentials in the heart of every newborn: the day of its death, its success and riches in life, and whether she or he will be a devout person or far away from God. I fast and pray especially that my child will remain close to God. It is especially beneficial to recite the chapter from the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, about Mary, the mother of Jesus, since she was the most devout mother. As long as the baby is still in the womb, God might change his mind if he had ordained otherwise. God will never reject a mother's prayer."

"But Ibu Shinto, what if you have morning sickness or feel very hungry?"

"In that case I am forced to stop the fast, but of course I continue the prayers. This happened during two of my five pregnancies. I did the fast for those children after they were born, and to add strength to my fast, I asked the other children and all my students to join me for nine months."

Shinto is a unique woman in the world of Islam. She

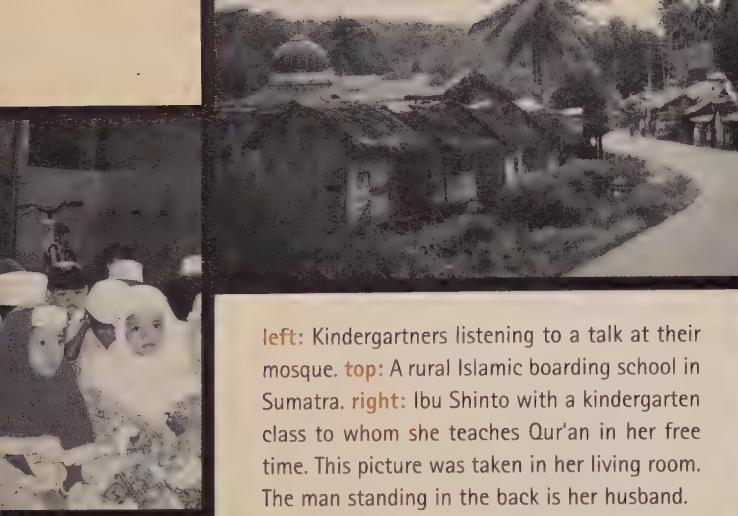
is a mother, the founder of a religious boarding school for girls, and an Islamic preacher. In the Christian vocabulary, you would call her a missionary. Her fire for Islam is ever glowing, and she is on the road day and night to keep it aflame. This has earned her great respect from both women and men. Yet when asked what she considers her most important calling, she answers that her role as a mother is the one assigned to her by God.

I met Ibu Shinto when I taught at a seminary in Indonesia. We became good friends, and I regularly visited her school. Once when we met after I had been on leave, it struck me that she had lost weight. She told me that she was making up the fast for the son whose pregnancy had been difficult. That remark triggered a flood of questions from me about being a Muslim mother.

MOTHERHOOD IN ISLAM

Motherhood is the core of a Muslim woman's identity. She is born and raised to become a mother. Whatever education a woman attains, it is first and foremost for the benefit of her future children. The burden of guiding the new generation of Muslims rests on her, and if she disregards this important duty, the entire civilization may disintegrate. According to Ibu Shinto, "Good mothers create wholesome nations."

As soon as a woman becomes a mother, she is given a second name. People refer to her by the name of her oldest son, for example, Mother of Muhammad or Umm Muhammad. When she has only daughters, she will be called by the first daughter's name, such as Mother of Fatima.



left: Kindergartners listening to a talk at their mosque. **top:** A rural Islamic boarding school in Sumatra. **right:** Ibu Shinto with a kindergarten class to whom she teaches Qur'an in her free time. This picture was taken in her living room. The man standing in the back is her husband.



Islam regards mothers highly. Sayings by the Prophet Muhammad about the respect due to one's mother abound: for example, "Heaven lies under the feet of the mothers." The Qur'an urges the son to be good to his parents, especially to his mother, because "in travail upon travail did his mother bear him" (32:14). The Qur'an stresses the importance of nurturing the newborn child. It advises the mother to nurse the child for two years and to find a wet nurse if she does not have enough milk. During those years, the father is obliged to take good care of the mother, to clothe and feed her (2:233).

Marriage in Islam is considered an act of worship; in Islamic understanding, God abhors those who choose to remain single. If a man postpones marriage because he is too poor to support a family, the Prophet's tradition advises him to practice fasting to help stave off sexual desire.

Muslims consider a large number of children not only a blessing but also a sign of ultimate trust in God. Even the poorest of the poor feel assured that God will feed their offspring. The ideal of every couple is to have at least one son. Sons continue the family line, support their aged parents, and serve as lifelong guardians for their sisters, whose marriages might end in divorce or widowhood. Sons are the backbone of a family; they guarantee its financial and physical survival. Sons also can become leaders of Islam, which bestows even more blessing on their parents.

In many Muslim countries, the birth of a daughter brings sorrow, while the birth of a son is celebrated with great festivity. Two goats are offered to celebrate the arrival of a son, but only one for a daughter. A son's circumcision is a festive occasion. No comparable celebration is held for girls. Sons always come first; when money is tight, sons eat first and then the daughters. Likewise, sons are sent to school and the girls stay at home, though in many places schools for girls are growing. A son has to study the Qur'an and can pursue further studies. Girls get up in the morning to help with the household chores, while sons can sleep until breakfast is served because they "have to save energy for study."

EDUCATING THE CHILDREN

After the child is past the toddler stage, the mother teaches the child Islamic virtues, duties, and beliefs. Instilling morals (*akhlag*) is considered fundamental in Islam. Learning politeness toward adults is part of this formation. Children receive detailed instruction on how to behave respectfully toward parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, neighbors, and friends. Ibu Shinto considers this the basis for a better world: "You have to learn how to be good to those nearest to you first." She especially ensures that her children learn to pay due respect to their father, who is the head of the household and to whose authority all must submit.



left: A warning sign found in an Islamic country.
top: Girls memorizing the Qur'an. **right:** A group of children on their way to the mosque.

Ibu Shinto's greatest challenge is to prepare her sons and daughters for their respective roles in religion and society. Following age-old Islamic conventions, she teaches ideas specific to gender. Both boys and girls learn the prayers and texts from the Qur'an, but in the long run, religious training for boys takes place in the mosques, where they go with their father. In most Muslim countries, women seldom attend services in the mosque, so girls learn their ritual prayers at home.

Children also learn to prevent mixing of the sexes. As early as preschool, boys and girls are not allowed to see each other without proper clothing: a head veil for girls, long sleeves for boys and girls, pants and skirts below the knee. As boys grow older, they have more freedom; girls stay close to home for fear of blemishing their honor.

At the same time, Ibu Shinto guards her children against prejudices about women's capacities. Some teachers believe that girls have less intellectual capacity than boys and that girls are a constant source of temptation that interferes with boys' closeness to God. Ibu Shinto does not accept these views, although she was taught them as a child. She does not allow her sons to utter misogynist expressions and tries to teach them equality between men and women. This is a challenge: As her sons grow up, they will learn from other teachers. Yet she cannot give up, because one day the sons will be husbands and fathers, and how they treat their wives and daughters will depend on

the model Ibu Shinto has set for them.

As each son grows older, the father takes over his formation, because he is ultimately responsible for the whole family's religious observance. But in the modern world where boys and girls go to state schools, where television exposes them to new ideas, and where many institutions once held sacrosanct are challenged, a mother has to help her sons learn how to navigate. Ibu Shinto is acutely aware of this responsibility. For example, the Qur'an allows polygamy, and in theory Ibu Shinto could become mother-in-law to four wives of one son. Her own father was married to two wives. Nowadays the expectations of Muslim women are changing, and many refuse to enter into such a marriage. Although her husband tells their sons that having more than one wife can be of great merit, Ibu Shinto explains the Islamic teachings concerning this topic from a woman's point of view.

Ibu Shinto's task as a mother never ends. She will not be a domineering mother-in-law when her children (especially the sons) get married, but she will always offer religious advice. Most of all, she will pray that they continue to grow in their faith. When the day comes that she is called home, her children will continue to pray for her.

Nelly van Doorn-Harder taught Islamic and interfaith studies for five years at an interdenominational Protestant school of theology in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



Brazilian street children share a smile and a "thumbs up."

of the
Women **ELCA** 

DOLLARS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

How Your Gifts Give New Hope

by Doris Strieter

"A few days ago we received your special gift for our Street Children Program. We are currently providing daily help for 350 children and youngsters, and we assure you that it is with great gratitude that we accept the gift so kindly offered."

Gilda Liane da Cruz, Reconciliation Community Program, São Paulo, Brazil

The Street Children Program is located in a slum outside São Paulo, Brazil. It is one of 18 ministries around the world that received a grant from the 2002 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering Offering. These ELCA-endorsed ministries are initiated by churches around the world to support education, work-skill development, and leadership empowerment for women.

Millions of desperately poor children in Brazil are forced to find their living on the streets. For the many whose families cannot afford to feed them, life on the streets is their only option. Often they can earn more than their parents' meager wages. Other children may not work on the streets but have nowhere safe to go while their parents are at work. For all these children, street life is dangerous,

making them vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and even murder.

It is for these children that the Lutheran Church in São Paulo began an outreach program that has grown from its small beginnings into a school providing a safe community environment for 250 to 400 children every day. Children ages three to six are given daily meals in "The Children's Cosy Place," a day care center that also offers preschool activities. For older children and teens, a youth community center provides meals, recreation, tutoring, music and art, vocational skills training, and medical assistance.

With the assistance of the \$2,500 grant from Women of the ELCA, the Street Children Program can continue to give these children of God a taste of the abundant life that God wills for all of us.

Other grants from the Triennial Gathering Offering are providing funding for:

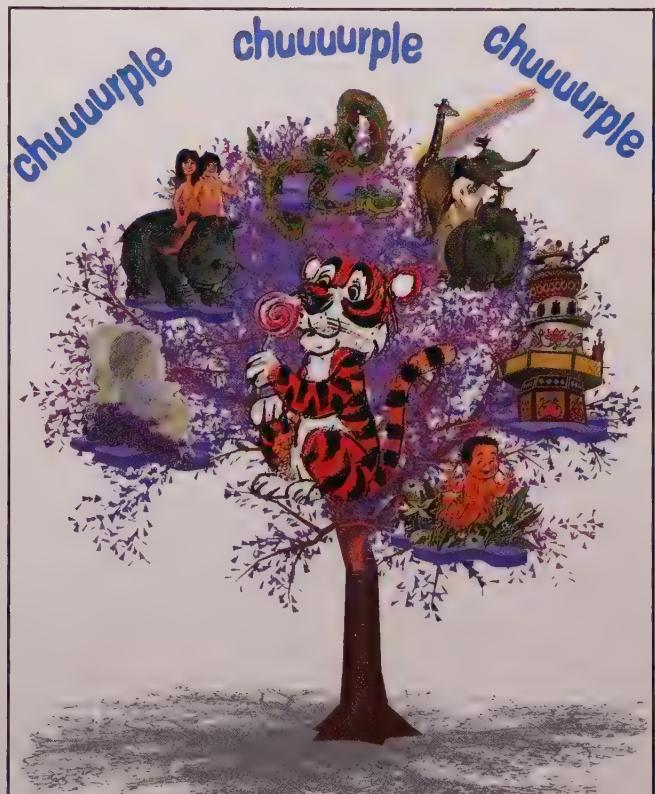
- health kits for schools and hospitals in Argentina
- community health promoters in Chile (see the short article on this program in the February 2003 *Interchange*)
- an organizer of women's savings groups in Bangladesh
- Christian education and training in handicrafts for low-income women in India
- a child prostitution prevention program in Thailand
- scholarships for women university students in Indonesia
- scholarships for young girls in schools in Palestine operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan
- English textbooks for Lutheran schools in the Slovak Republic
- scholarships for Christian high school girls in the Central African Republic
- support for street children in Ethiopia
- job-skills training programs for women in Liberia
- women church workers in Madagascar
- training in income-generating skills for women in Senegal
- educational opportunities and job training for women and children amputees in Sierra Leone
- maternal and child health programs in Tanzania
- music scholarships for students at a Lutheran university in Tanzania
- HIV/AIDS education for young people in Zimbabwe

Through our support of these activities, Women of the ELCA continues to bring the good news of the gospel to women and children around the world.

In addition to the Triennial Gathering Offering

grants, Women of the ELCA, through endowments and contributions, awards grants annually to programs that strengthen families and communities in the United States and around the world.

For information about making a financial contribution to the grants program or applying for a grant, please contact Women of the ELCA Grants Program, 8760 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631, or call 800-630-4222, ext. 2747.



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uprooted both Hebrew and Greek ways of thinking.

Productive Roots

“They remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest” (Luke 24:8–9). Roots gather moisture and nutrients underground for the sake of what will grow above ground in the light.

I find it fascinating that no human eye witnessed the moment of the resurrection. Later disciples looked at the evidence, but no one saw it happen. The guards might have heard something, but no one saw anything. There will always be that gap in time and experience that requires faith. I can only say, “I believe in the resurrection.” I can never say, “I saw the resurrection,” or “I know it for a fact because I know that others saw it.”

I am eternally grateful to Mary Magdalene and the other women for going to the tomb on the third day, weary with weeping but determined to honor Jesus. Even though the male disciples dismissed their witness as an “idle tale” (Luke 24:11), their courageous voices ring out through generations as our connection to the reality of the resurrection.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples in the days after the resurrection, he provided instruction “through the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:2). He wanted the believers to be able to reach deep into the traditions and draw out for new listeners “the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus” (Acts 13:32–33).

Since the first century, Lent and Easter have been a time for instructing candidates and initiates. During this time, they grow in their faith and their knowledge of the story of Christianity and then, at the Easter Vigil, gather with the community for Baptism and Affirmation of Baptism.

Just as a healthy plant’s roots grow deeper as its stem grows stronger and its leaves fuller, so our wit-

ness grows stronger and brighter as we reach more deeply into the roots of Scripture and church tradition. The Spirit of Christ and of his resurrection gives power to believers to remember, to proclaim, and to die with hope. Together we confess, “We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen” (Nicene Creed, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 84).

Epilogue

As long as there are cemeteries and families who walk through them, there will be a need for the Christian witness to resurrection life. “The death from which Jesus releases us brings resurrection power to all of those little deaths through which we pass in a lifetime,” writes Marge Wold in *The Power of Ordinary Christians*.

“Although salvation belongs to God in Christ, the mission of God has been entrusted to people living in God’s world who have experienced new life in Christ. Human ears must listen for human cries, human tongues must speak the words that set people free, human feet must run swiftly to release captives, and human hands must be quick to open locked doors,” Wold continues.³ Rooted in the power of Jesus’ resurrection, fed by the Holy Spirit, and reaching eagerly for the sunshine of God’s promised future, let’s keep growing and blooming for Christ.

Donna L. Herzfeldt-Kamprath is the co-pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Klamath Falls, Ore., and Trinity Lutheran Church in Tulelake, Calif.

Notes

1. John Reumann, *Jesus in the Church’s Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 114.
2. See J. A. T. Robinson, “Resurrection in the New Testament,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 44.
3. Margaret Wold, *The Power of Ordinary Christians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 16, 19–20.



The Perfect Easter

by Mary Ellen Kiesner

AS A SMALL CHILD, I harbored a particular mental image of Easter morning. On this perfect morning, the birds would be singing, the air would be sweet with the scent of flowers blooming, and the trees and bushes would be a sea of green.

Have you seen the Lord?

Of course, my Easter basket would contain the most delectable treats this side of heaven. I hoped that every decorated egg would be colorful, flawless, wonderfully designed. I would wear the prettiest dress to church—no coat would be needed. And I would proudly wear a beautiful Easter bonnet and slip on little white gloves to complete the outfit.

Have you seen the Lord?

On Good Friday I would attend church and listen to the age-old story. I would wonder how the soldiers could take Jesus. Why didn't he stand up to his persecutors? How dared they nail him to a cross? Why didn't Jesus call on God to save him? And then quietly, just to myself, I would say, perhaps just this time it will turn out differently.

Have you seen the Lord?

Does the perfect Easter exist merely in the wild imagination of a child? It's altogether possible. In reality, Wisconsin Easters are seasonably cold, and sometimes we have snow. A coat is almost always necessary. The birds usually shiver in their feathers. Only a few brave crocuses dare peek out of the ground.

For the most part, my Easter basket was nice. But always a few eggs had been dipped too many times.

Have you seen the Lord?

But each Easter there was one perfect part. It was that empty tomb! It was the risen Savior! It was the Holy Spirit flooding my soul in the promise of my baptism with all the warmth that only God can provide.

I have seen the Lord!

Reflect with me, faithful readers, during this glorious Easter season. We continue to recognize our craving for perfection in the imperfect. Innocence may have given way to lives that have to be lived with imperfections. We will certainly face disappointments. We will have to weather seasons of difficulty, disease, and death. Even our best-laid plans may not create the perfectly decorated eggs that we hoped for. But thankfully, perfection lies in something far beyond what we could hope to create with our earthly attempts!

I have seen the Lord!

We have a God who took on the imperfection of humankind and gave us perfection in Jesus Christ our Lord. Our souls can bask in the warmth, revel in the glory, and celebrate the perfect Easter. Rejoice with me, dear children of God. I have seen the Lord! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Mary Ellen Kiesner is churchwide president of Women of the ELCA.



Easter Hope

by Catherine Malotky

JESUS, IT IS NOT FASHIONABLE TO BE TOO STRONG. EVERYONE IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE EQUAL SAY AND VALUE—AT LEAST IN THEORY.

When the imbalance is clear, as when a CEO receives a paycheck hundreds of times larger than that of the data-entry clerk, we have cultural grumble. We don't like pushy people either. We get irritated at people who butt in line, and really annoyed by people who don't pull their weight and then claim all the credit. Who do these folks think they are?

People with strong opinions can be troublesome too. We are even wary of religious zealots. After September 11, 2001, we know how damaging that kind of conviction can be. And most of us aren't spiritually moved by the worship traditions of some of our neighbors; we are calmer, most of us. Less raw emotion and more thinking suits us better.

So we don't appreciate strong people, Jesus. They take up too much space and push at us too often.

But when I was little, I wanted my mom and dad to be strong and to take care of me. And now that I'm an adult, sometimes I miss that assurance of strength when things get very hard. As a matter of fact, I would like it if you would be a little stronger, God. Rescue me from my troubles and tidy up my life. I'd also be really grateful if you would take care of the world beyond me.

We have quite a mess out there. I just don't know what's going to happen next. How come you don't take care of this stuff—just let the good guys win, and clean it all up, okay?

Instead, Jesus, you stood before Pilate. He tried to get you off, but your accusers wouldn't have it. You were messing things up in their tidy lives. They had worked out how to be saved and safe, how to keep a low profile among the Romans and preserve what they had. But you kept preaching, healing, and riling things up.

You didn't look like a messiah to them, and you don't look the part to me, either. I need a really strong God, and you were hung on that cross and you died.

You said to Pilate that you were a king, that you had come to bring the truth. And three days after your death, your grave was empty. You lived again. Is hope what you bring? The world is a mess, but it's not your place to come in and straighten it out. Your place is to draw us into life—our own and the world's. And if we see in your death and life what you promise to us, then we can work at redeeming our lives and our world. Then we have a reason to be alive.

You are stronger than we might have thought, Jesus, and you call us to be stronger than we might have thought we could be. God loves us. Who knows what we can do with an Easter life?

Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as representative for Region 3 (North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota). An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

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But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

**They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
but when they went in, they did not find the body.**

While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?

He is not here, but has risen.

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Luke 24:1-9 New Revised Standard Version

The account of the women visiting Jesus' tomb after his death and resurrection.

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